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Author(s): FAZLUR RAHMAN
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IQBĀL'S IDEA OF THE MUSLIM*

FAZLUR RAHMAN

In his poetic works, Iqbāl has often used the terms "Muslim" and "*Mu'min*"—in the final analysis they seem to be interchangeable —and has described these in various ways, attributing to them certain qualities. One obvious way of treating of our subject would be to assemble such verses and to try to see what all these amount to. This would, however, be a very superficial and mechanical treatment, since it would lack the necessary synthesizing unity. But if one is not content with superficiality and still keeps the same approach of assembling verses, one falls into the peril of subjectivism; i.e., of projecting on to Iqbāl whatever ideology or philosophy one may have imbibed elsewhere. This is in fact one of the two basic and patent maladies that have bedevilled and blighted Iqbāl Studies and stunted their serious growth. It would not, indeed, be too much to say that next to the Prophet (peace and blessings of God be upon him!) and perhaps to certain early figures of Islam, Iqbāl has been subjected to the greatest amount of posthumous tyranny of interpretation at the expense of a genuine understanding. His support has thus been claimed by the advocates of a whole spectrum of possible opinions ranging from naked Communism to a crass conservatism that is an unmistakable voice from the grave.

One important reason why people have got away with Iqbāl in whatever direction they have pleased with impunity is precisely the difficulty of formulating his central theme, the pivotal core of his doctrine that would put everything that he said in its proper perspective. Iqbāl, like other thinkers, has expressed his thought in his writings and more especially in his *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, etc. But the difficult task of constructive interpretation is precisely to locate or formulate its central theme so that this whole exposition becomes uniform and intelligible. Otherwise it does and has appeared to people not only mutually inconsistent but downright contradictory. Such a statement of Iqbāl's pivotal thesis cannot be expected to be found in Iqbāl himself, although its

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sufficiently strong yet partial formulations and indications are interspersed everywhere in his writings. The primary reason is that Iqbāl is a thinker and not an interpreter. In order to interpret someone the interpreter has to give what he regards as the kernel of the interpretee's message. With Iqbāl, however, little serious thought has been given to this task and even most well-meaning interpreters especially of the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent have seen in him what they liked—a super-man—the repository of power, a gospel of love, ' Pure Duration ' and the idea of movement, *Khudī* —whatever it has meant, etc. Before, therefore, I go on to address myself to my present task, I take this opportunity to put forward a strong plea for rescuing Iqbāl from this state of affairs, for a serious study of his thought and for resuming the threads from him onwards.

It appears that when during his studies in the West, Iqbāl began developing a positive philosophy of life under which he evolved his definite attitude to this world, this involved if it did not even presuppose, an acute perception and awareness of Reality; that is to say Iqbāl had become conscious of a Reality that was essentially *demanded* both of itself and of others. The identity of this consciousness of Reality with the Islamic concept of God is only too obvious: *a demanding Reality and a commanding God* is *exactly the same thing.* How did Iqbāl arrive at this perception? From all I have studied of his works, the argument seems to me to run as something like this: If you can divest yourself of the unnecessary assumptions and prejudices created by certain philosophic traditions and reflect on the elemental *facts* of existence, you are faced with a truly striking, indeed, a kind of magical situation, as it were. If this statement seems strange to you, imagine for a moment that nothing exists except yourself—just nothing at all—and then all of a sudden something comes into existence, would you not regard this fact as something drawing or claiming your special attention? Even the phrase " come into existence " used here and, indeed, commonly used, presupposes a philosophic myth, viz., that there is a realm either of non-existence or of super-existence from where things walk *into* existence, so to say. But since many things, in fact, do exist, we take their existence as a commonplace fact and not as the primary magic of Reality. For Iqbāl, however, this was not the case and he drew a very momentous lesson from this, viz., that the character of Reality is an outward-pushing process. This

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yields the idea of force, energy, activity. Reality, then, is dynamic and *the facts of existence are acts of existence.* Certain contemporary scientific doctrines about energy and the new theory of the expanding universe confirmed his conviction.

As is well known, this insight wrought a revolution in Iqbāl's outlook on life. Whereas previously he had seen oneness and sameness in all things, he now perceived the uniqueness and newness of everything. Whereas previously his ideal bliss was a kind of Ṣūfistic peace, now he perceived the greatness and the glory of the sweat and the struggle. From the Platonic realm of eternal Ideas, the centre of gravity moves to the web of space-time and we are right in the midst of a noisy and tumultuous world. But this picture is still incomplete, and, if taken as the whole truth about Iqbāl—as has been done by many including myself in my first article* I wrote about him—it is unfair to him both as Iqbāl and as a great representative thinker of Islam.

If pure energy and dynamic force were the only attributes of Reality, it would be just a brute power, no more than a tremendous stream of steam issuing from an engine. But the engine of Reality, besides its power, has certain other equally fundamental built-in attributes. These are the attributes of directed or purposive creativity, which confer upon the whole process the qualities of an orderly and synthetic nature. Otherwise, we could not have a cosmos at all but a stark chaos. In fact, the more one studies Iqbāl, the more one is impressed by the ultimacy of the spiritual-moral nature of Reality, and one cannot help concluding that both the dynamic quality and the directive-synthetic nature of the process of Reality stem from its spiritual-moral quality. This is the reason why Iqbāl, instead of completely rejecting Ṣūfism, rejected the negative forms of Ṣūfism because of their world-denying and weakening tendencies and sought to keep and encourage the positive spiritual elements—like those represented, e.g., by Rūmī and Mujaddid-i Alf-i Thānī. This is also the reason for his powerful and systematic critique of the West which is a living monument of dynamism and expansion but exhibits little signs of an organic synthesis which is a function of directiveness.

Finally, it is directly under this vision of the moving and imperious Reality that Iqbāl came to speak disparagingly of intellectualism and reason (*'Aql*) and generally opposed it to *'Ishq*

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which is the imperious, direct principle of creativity. In the *Reconstruction*, reason is appreciated more by Iqbāl than in his poetry where only occasionally it appears as complementary to *'Ishq* but mostly as a sort of shadow-reality, utterly uncreative and imbecile but rather cunning and sly but a good servant if correctly subjected to *'Ishq*. Iqbāl obviously did not address himself to the problem of elaborating the relationship between the two, but this has resulted in some unfortunate misunderstandings, both by his followers and critics. When one stresses dynamism and power but at the same time derides the claims of reason—which is, after all, the only instrument of formulating human purposes, one is unnecessarily exposing oneself to suspicious criticisms. Iqbāl himself has thrown some pregnant remarks on the relationship of reason to intuition. I think the threads must be picked up from where Iqbāl left off on this very fundamental issue—which is, indeed, a problem of our religious history also. I am thinking of the age-old Ṣūfī opposition between *Kashf* and *'Aql*. In the light of what our best minds have said on this topic explicitly or implicitly we must formulate an adequate epistemological theory. Otherwise, we cannot create the necessary links between the transcendental and the actual, which as a living religious, progressive society it is among our fundamental tasks to perform. Iqbāl's entire philosophy seems to me to demand this from us.

Iqbāl, however, says with perfect justice that reason, or formulative reason as such, does not move anyone whereas Reality moves. Iqbāl is focussing our attention on this imperative-giving quality of Reality. No man can, therefore, genuinely stand before it without catching fire and without setting others on fire as well. Now, whosoever so stands before God and is so transformed is a Muslim. In the implementation of the ideal on earth, in the establishment of the right, just and good order, his will becomes insuperable. The Qur'ān calls Abraham a Muslim. There is no distinction between the Muslim and the *Mu'min*. Such a person or such a people, if there be any, takes the destinies of the world into his or its own hands, because he or it has become literally a collaborator of God. Here what Iqbāl calls *Khudī* or true selfhood is perfectly and legitimately realized.

It is with this vision that Iqbāl re-discovered the real message of the Qur'ān and resurrected the true nature of the personality and activity of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him!). For Iqbāl's

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vision of Reality, as we have recounted it, is exactly the God of the Qur'ān who bestows power-in-righteousness, creativity-for-goodness and, in fact, demands imperiously from men that he receives these; else he is doomed. And the perfect paradigm for the realization of this ideal he located in the Holy Prophet Muḥammad (peace of God be upon him!) and upon the movement of Islam he organized and launched on earth. It is to this fresh recapturing of the Qur'ān, so to say, that he refers when he admonishes:—

ترے ضمیر پہ جب تک نہ ہو نزول کتاب
گرہ کشا ہے نہ رازی نہ صاحب کشاف[1]

"Until the (meaning of the) Book reveals itself to your heart (afresh), neither Rāzī nor the author of *Kashshāf* is of any avail." And he says about the Muslim:

قاری نظر آتا ہے حقیقت میں ہے قرآن[2]

"He appears to be a Qur'ān-reader but is, in fact, the Qur'ān itself." And although he is talking in poetry, he is not talking poetry but literal truth when he says about the Prophet:

بمصطفیٰ برساں خویش را کہ دیں ہمہ اوست
اگر باو نرسیدی تمام بولہبی ست[3]

"Endeavour to identify yourself with the Prophet for he is the whole of the Faith: If you cannot do so (your efforts are) sheer Abū-Lahabhood." The Qur'ān and the Prophet set afoot a monument that presently grew into a storm. The leaders of this movement, under the inspiration of the Prophet, took the world into their own hands. They wanted to establish an order—a right, just and good order through socio-economic creativity and justice. This was imperiously demanded by the God of the Qur'ān. That God still demands it, with the same imperiousness and Iqbāl's sensitive heart felt it to its innermost fibres. He praised certain things in the Western systems; he also appreciated certain things in the Communist ideology for, make no mistake that whatever you may think of the Communist methods, you cannot deny the initial idealistic *élan* of Communism. But all these Iqbāl appreciated as partial fulfilments, partial failures, in varying degrees, of the Islamic ideal. Just as one plans to make, say, a rocket. One makes the first attempt and the rocket explodes. One makes a second attempt and the rocket takes off—which is, in itself, a great achievement—but it falls after a few yards. Even so is the case with Iqbāl's appreciation and criticism of the manifestation of these ideologies.

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When Iqbāl looked at those people from whom he had sprung and who claimed to be the traditional inheritors of the Qur'ān and the Prophet's legacy, he was certainly disconcerted. I think it would be a mistake to suppose that when Iqbāl called people to his vision of Reality, i.e. to Islam, that he meant this call only for Muslims and not for humanity. This could not be the case in the nature of things; but I have made this remark because some people have cavilled at him by saying that after an initial phase of universalism, Iqbāl became narrow and sectarian, i.e., confined to Muslim community. This is a terrible superficiality. However, there is a perfectly valid sense in which Iqbāl considered it natural to address primarily those people who are traditionally Muslims and call upon them to become real Muslims. There is a verse which is full of biting and sarcastic taunt:

مسکینی و محکومی و نومیدی جاوید
جس کا یہ تصوف ہو وہ اسلام کر ایجاد[4]

"Invent for yourself an Islam whose Ṣūfism consists of imbecility, slavery and eternal despair."

The truth is that despite the fact that Muslims were broken and down-trodden and had in fact for centuries drifted from the true vision of the Qur'ān and the Holy Prophet, Iqbāl squarely vested his faith in them. Despite their actual condition, they are committed by their express allegiance to the Qur'ān and the Holy Prophet. Their love for Islam and the Holy Prophet is unlimited. If only they can be endowed afresh with the true and powerful Qur'ānic vision of the order of society, and their energies are channelled, they are capable of performing the greatest feat yet witnessed by history. This is how he expressed his faith:

گرچہ مثل غنچہ دل گیریم ما
گلستان میرد اگر میریم ما[5]

"Although we are gripped with anguish like the unopened bud; should we perish, this whole garden perishes too."

This cosmic significance which Iqbāl attaches to a truly Islamic community is the same that the Qur'ān attaches to it, viz., that they are the key-community in the world, holding balance and fashioning history as an instrument of the Divine Will. The classical Muslim community verified this principle. It was not a matter of indifference to the world, e.g., whether an 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb existed or not. But this fateful position to establish an order in the world which is truly divine precisely because it is truly human is earned

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through incessant endeavour and creativeness at all levels and in all the fields and through sacrifice. The Qur'ān makes all these demands ; God commands all this and only then makes the promise. Even so does Iqbāl call upon us to act and work and, in order to direct our work, to do constant stock-taking :

صورت شمشیر ہے دست قضا میں وہ قوم
کرتی ہے جو ہر زماں اپنے عمل کا حساب[6]

"That people is like the sword in the hands of Fate, which constantly takes stock of its actions."

The Community is thus charged with this task and this role and should it fail to fulfil it, down must it go. The Qur'ān tells it in no unclear terms, that God makes no unilateral promises and in fact it accuses the Jews of claiming such unilateral promises from God. The Qur'ān declares, indeed, that if Muslims will not do the job properly in the world, they will be replaced by others : " who would not be like you ".[7] Again, according to the Qur'ān, when Abraham asked God in prayer whether his leadership of men would be transmitted to his heirs, he was told, " My promise extends not to the unjust".[8] The task of the Muslim philosopher is to formulate this vision in clear terms for the Community, to provide the middle-term links in an order of priorities between the day-to-day actual and the transcendental. This is neither an easy task nor a lazy one. Besides a constructive will and an acute mind the philosopher must feed himself thoroughly upon the rich legacy of Islam in the past—the last great link in this chain being Iqbāl—as well as on the fruits of the efforts of the social sciences of the present. He must not weave a vacant web of pure speculation but feed his speculation on these materials.

This is what I understand to be the legacy of Iqbāl. If this lives, Iqbāl lives ; if it does not, neither Iqbāl nor Islam nor Muslims have much chance to live, let alone to fulfil the role assigned to them by the Qur'ān.

NOTES

1. *Bāl-i Jibrīl*, Lahore 1959, p. 112.
2. *Ḍarb-i Kalīm*, Lahore 1959, p. 57.
3. *Armaghān-i Ḥijāz*, Lahore 1959, p. 278.
4. *Ḍarb-i Kalīm*, p. 30.
5. *Asrār-u Rumūz*, Lahore 1948, p. 139.
6. *Bāl-i Jibrīl*, p. 136.
7. Qur'ān, XLVII : 38.
8. *Ibid.*, II : 124.

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